Manakin Village
Goochland County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-218

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Virginia

Historic American Buildings Survey

Prepared at Washington Office
for Southeast Unit

MANAKIN VILLAGE
Goochland County, Virginia

The serious plight of the Huguenots in France during the years of their increasing persecution by the Roman Catholic Church had created concern in all Protestant countries. Holland and England had been among their principal refuges, though Sweden, Denmark, Germany, and Russia had also received them. With the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, and the disappearance of the last formal guarantees of religious tolerance, all Huguenots who could flee France did so.

The great numbers of refugees in England and Holland called for some plan of resettlement, which often took the form of immigration to the American Colonies. As early as 1623, Walloon Protestant refugees from the South Belgian provinces occupied by Spain and subject to the Inquisition had petitioned the British Crown for permission to settle in Virginia. This was not granted, however, and the colonists under Jesse de Forest had immigrated to New Netherlands. After the fall of La Rochelle the Baron de Sauce went to England and in 1629 sought permission to settle with a colony of Huguenots in Virginia. A settlement was made in Nansemond County on a patent of 200,000 acres, but no records of it remain. In 1683 the Huguenot Relief Committee in London paid £70 for 55 French Protestants to go to Virginia. In 1685 the King undertook to settle a large group under Oliver de la Muce in Virginia, and a tract of land on the North Carolina border near Norfolk was proposed. To this an objection was raised (in a Proposal dated 1698) by William Byrd as Attorney of the Colony, as the elevation of the country was low, its soil swampy, and its sovereignty disputed by the two colonies. A site above the falls of the James was recommended and was determined upon. This was known as Manakin, from the Indians who had dwelt near there. The settlement was originally on the south side of the James, 20 miles above Richmond, and opposite the present town of the same name, which is the subject of the accompanying photographs.

The group of Huguenots embarked in four fleets from Gravesend in 1700 and made their way to Manakin. A list of the immigrants is dated Jamestown, September 20, 1700, and enumerates 155 males. In December of the same year the accounts show an expenditure of £5.8.0: "To carpenter and workmen who had cut downe, sawne and prepared timbers for the Church and minister's house"--indicating that the settlement was well under way. Unfortunately it had not been made early enough in the year for crops to be planted. Governor Nicholson issued an appeal for contributions to help the French subsist until the next harvest. Another gesture of friendship was an act of the Assembly in December 1700 to free the settlers from taxation and to establish a parish at Manakin which was to be called King William. The act provided that:

"Whereas a considerable number of French Protestant refugees

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have been lately imported into his Majesty's colony and dominions, several of which refugees have seated themselves above the falls of James River, at, or near to a place commonly called and known by the name of Manakin towne, for the encouragement of said refugee to settle and remain together, as near as may be to the said Manakin towne, and the parts adjacent, shall be accounted and taken for inhabitants of a distinct parish by themselves; and the land which they now do and shall hereafter possess, at, or adjacent, to the said Manakin towne, shall be, and is hereby declared to be a parish of itselfe, distinct from any other parish, to be called and known by the name of King William Parish, in the county of Henrico, and not lyable to the payment of parish levies in any other parish whatsoever. And be it further enacted; That such and so many of the said refugees, as are already settled, or shall hereafter settle themselves as inhabitants of the said parish, shall themselves and their familyes, and every of them, be free and exempted from the payment of public and county levies for the space of seven years next, ensuing from the publication of this act."

That the exigencies of making a settlement prevented the French from creating at once a trim village is indicated by a letter written by William Byrd a year after the settlement. He says:

"We visited about seventy of their huts, being, most of them very mean; there being upwards of fourty of y'm betwixt ye two creeks, w'ch is about 4 miles along on ye River, and have cleared all ye old Manacan ffields for near three miles together, as also some others (who came thither last ffeb'ry) have done more work than they y't went thither first. . . . Indeed, they are very poor. . . . Tho' these people are very poor, yet they seem very cheerful and are (as farr as we could learn) very healthy, all they seem to desire is y't they might have Bread enough."

There is little in the records to allow the everyday course of the settlement to be followed. That it never became extremely prosperous is well known. The type of soil and the economy of the region dictated large acreages which were not possible on the 10,000-acre tract granted the settlers. At first only half of this acreage was apportioned, but later the whole area was laid out. By 1728 the number of tithables was only 130, as indicated in a letter from the "Inhabitants of King William parish in Manacan Town, Virginia" to their former rector, Mr. Nearne, in London. This went on to say that the parish was not large enough to maintain its own minister, but as the parish was a royal gift to the French refugees it ought not to be dissolved or united with another parish. It also stated that many understood no English but that they would be glad to have prayers and sermons in both French and English. The church at Manakin persisted until 1857, when it disappeared.

When the original grant became outgrown the Huguenots and their

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descendants immigrated to the neighboring counties and to the Rappahannock Valley, where as early as 1651 a Frenchman Le Roy was settled near the present Port Royal.

The early architectural remains in the vicinity of the French settlement (about the town of Huguenot on the south side of the James, and Manakin on the north) are scanty and have not been the subject of enough study to determine whether they show French influence. There are other regions on the Eastern Seaboard where the Huguenots have been denizened, and it might be assumed that the architectural forms and details in all areas might be the same. This is not entirely the case. In North Carolina the two-room floor plan house has end chimneys and double entrance doors. The house was divided down the middle, without an entrance hall; one door led into one of the rooms, and one into the other. A door in the partition wall shows that the house was not intended to be a double dwelling. In South Carolina the two-room plan persisted, but normally with chimneys in the wall between the front and rear rooms. The houses were larger, being doubled in depth, two rooms and a stair hall having been added to the rear. These two plans recur with variations in New Jersey and New York and to some extent perhaps in Virginia. The ~~quarters~~ brick house (VABS) at Keswick, near Huguenot Springs, has the two-room plan (two door) most familiar to North Carolina and New Jersey.

The normal building type, especially near Manakin, is two rooms with a central chimney. It reappears frequently and is so unusual elsewhere in Virginia as to suggest it is a variant of the French type. The houses are of wood, with two rooms between which the chimney is built. In front of the chimney is a small entry, to which the single center door opens. Corresponding to the entry in the rear is a storage closet. Few of the buildings seen exhibited early details except one deserted house in Henrico county near Gayton.

The Gayton house had twin-door openings in which were hung sheathed doors to which were applied cleats to form panels. This is a practice much used in French Colonial houses and may be observed especially in the West Indies. The interior had been changed by the introduction of a stair to the attic, this formerly having been either unused or reached by a ladder. In the survey photographs this is called a quarters, but it may have been the dwelling of a small farmer.

All of the houses seen had the appearance of quarters, which in Virginia are characteristically small, frame, gabled structures with double doors. However, the distribution, number, and in some cases larger scale made it appear that the houses were not built as average quarters but perhaps as dwellings modeled on French prototypes of the early years of the settlement.

References: Quotations from Fosdick, Lucian J., French Blood in America, Fleming H. Revell Company, New York, 1906. Other sources: Griffis, W. E., The Story of the Walloons; Rosengarten, J. G., French Colonists and Exiles in the United States; Brock, Charles, Huguenot Immigration to Virginia.

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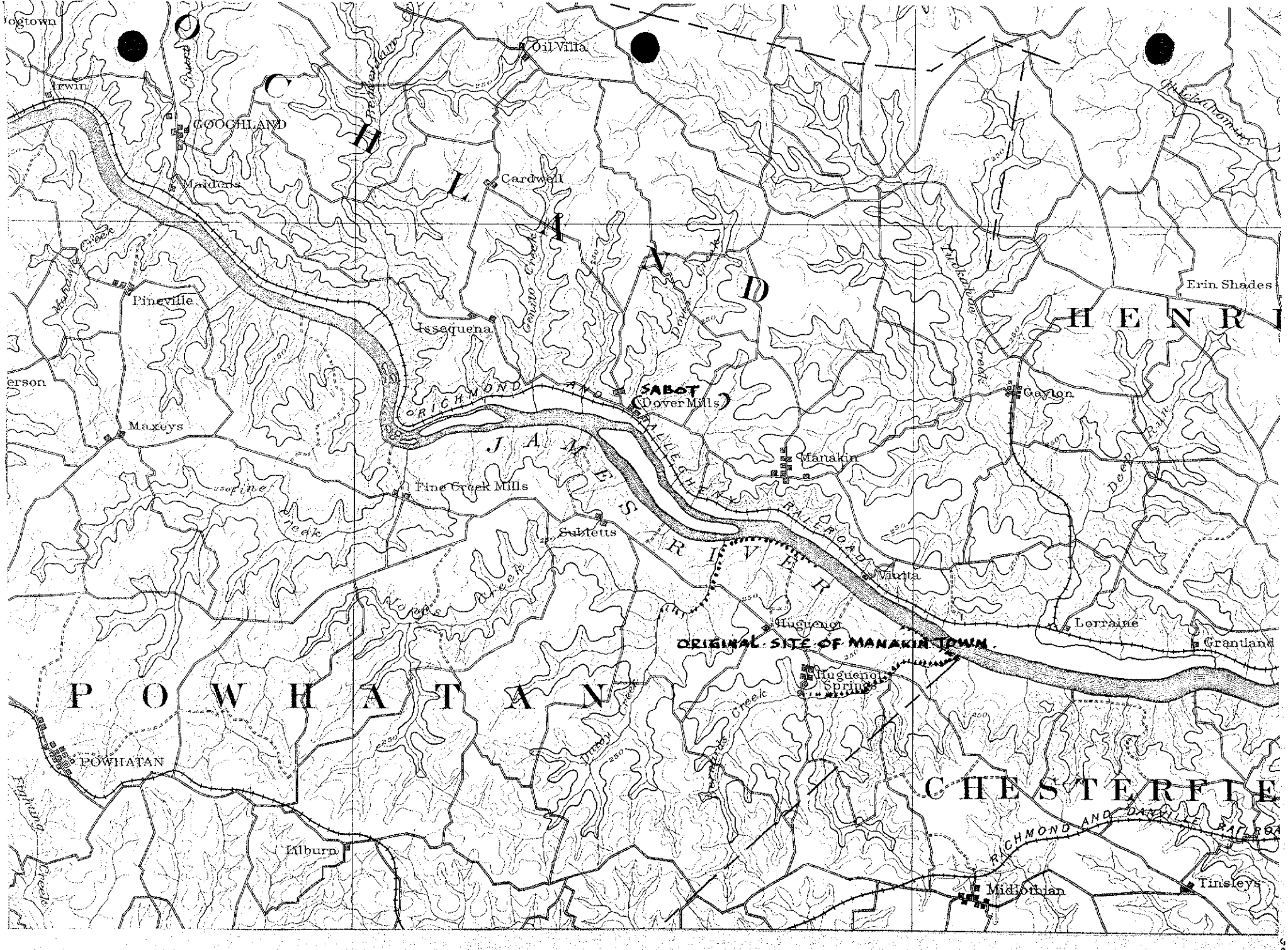

MAP SHOWING LOCATION OF HUGUENOT VILLAGES